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A
GENERAL IDEA
OF A
PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE,
ON A PLAN ENTIRELY NEW.

WITH
OBSERVATIONS on several WORDS that are variously
pronounced, as a SPECIMEN of the WORK.

DEDICATED TO
DAVID GARRICK, Esq.
By. J. WALKER.

K,

Quare, si fieri potest, & verba omnia, & vox, hujus alumnus urbis oleant: ut oratio
Romana planè videatur, non civitate donata. QUINTILIAN.

L O N D O N,

Printed for T. BECKET, Corner of the Adelphi, Strand; J. DODSLEY, Pall-Mall; J. ROBSON,
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MDCCLXXIV.

GENERAL

OF

PRONOUNCING

OF

ENGLISH



ON A PLAN

CONSTRUCTION

OF THE

PRONOUNCING

OF THE

ENGLISH

OF THE

LONDON

PRINTED BY

W. B. NICHOLS

TO
DAVID GARRICK, Esq.

SIR,

WHEN you permitted me to prefix your name to the following sheets, I did not apprehend how dangerous a favour you had granted me. I understood your distinction with the public, and thought a person of your talents the properest patron in the world for an essay on pronuntiation; I did not foresee, by the choice I had made, that I was raising the demands of the public upon me, nor did I reflect that expectation, when too much excited by promising appearances, is sure to revenge itself in proportion to its disappointment. The approach of publication increased my fears, and I already saw myself arraigned at that tribunal, so fatal to the merit of manuscripts, while under the obliging inspection of our friends. My mind misgave me that I had involved my patron in my guilt; and that in this, as well as other instances, you had been less attentive to your character as a judicious critic, than a ready promoter of whatever bears the least relation to the entertainment or improvement of the public. The goodness of your intention I plainly foresaw would never be sufficient to screen you from censure; for no generosity can shield a man, who has committed the unpardonable crime of excelling others; and the possession of various talents in an
eminent

eminent degree, affords envy a happy comparison to the disadvantage of some of them; as there is nothing so mean to which our vanity will not stoop, when it is flattered by depreciating others: but happily for the human race, these failings are only to be found in individuals; the public at large are ever generous and just; and whatever be the fate of the following sheets, will still consider Mr. Garrick, both from his personal abilities, and the unwearied assistance he is fond of affording to the faintest efforts of genius, not only as an ornament, but a real advantage to his country.

I am, with the utmost respect,

SIR,

your obliged and most obedient

humble servant,

J. WALKER.

A

GENERAL IDEA

OF A

PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY.

FEW subjects have more employed the pens of every class of critics than the irregularity of the English language. Foreigners have ranked the English among the most barbarous speakers of Europe, and Englishmen have seemed to despair of reducing their language to any rule. Dryden owns that he was frequently obliged to translate his English into Latin before he could answer for the grammar of it, and Swift complains that our greatest authors are in danger of becoming obsolete, from the want of something like a standard to preserve it in its present form. Johnson, who saw farther into this subject than any author before him, severely experienced the disorder and confusion among our writers; and though Lowth and Priestley contend warmly for the simplicity of the principles of our language, yet, with peculiar justness and accuracy, they exhibit the most striking proofs of the uncertainty of its usages. Indeed every Englishman who enters into an examination of his language, must, in some measure, confirm the charge so often brought against it; and there are none who have a relish for those perfections which are peculiar to it, but wish they were less disgraced by so numerous a catalogue of defects as sometimes reduces it to a level with the equivocal gibberish of gypsies.

But if the more essential and permanent parts of language, construction and orthography, are confessedly in this state of barbarity and confusion, what are we to think of its orthoëpy? It is scarcely probable that those who are so licentious in writing, where something remains for examination, will be more cautious in speaking, where language is necessarily instantaneous and fugitive. Written language, without any considerable variation, extends to the remotest distances, and

is, for a certain time at least, tolerably uniform; but speaking not only differs widely in different places at different times, but in the same place, and at the same time. The dialects not only of every quarter of the kingdom, but almost of every county, are distinguishable to the inhabitants of London; and the coarser and more rustic pronunciations of the North and West, actually go so far from the line of orthography as scarcely to be intelligible. Nay, as Swift observes, we have in London itself three different dialects, by which an inhabitant of the suburbs, the city, and the west end of the town may be distinguished; and there are few, I believe, who cannot add to this diversity by their own experience, that the very same words, in the same place, in the course of a few years, considerably alter in their pronunciation.

If this be the case then, what hopes are there that any method can be discovered to bind this varying Proteus, and make different ages and places speak the same language? If, by the same language, we understand a perfect uniformity in every respect, I confess such expectations are groundless; but, that speaking may be rendered much more uniform than it is; that, like every other human art, it may approach nearer to its object, can hardly be doubted by those who judge of language philosophically. There was a time when our language was less uniform and general than it is at present, when there was much greater diversity both in writing and pronunciation; and why may we not advance to still greater perfection, when we are invited to it by the religious respect we bear the authors of our country, and that sentiment of order and simplicity which is congenial to the mind of man?

It must be confessed indeed, that accurate pronunciation is the least important part of language. The grand necessities of nature are answered, and even great advances in science accomplished by language in a rude and imperfect state. Orthography, with all its varieties, is sufficiently uniform for the great purposes of life; and pronunciation has ever resources within itself to obviate any difficulties that may arise from its diversity. These pretences, I know, are constantly in the mouths of those who neither esteem nor understand the delicacies of language; and we might for the same reasons neglect every decent elegance and embellishment of life. The sordid and ungenerous behold with distaste every improvement of the mind, because it is not absolutely necessary to the existence of man; but let such consider, that they form a wrong estimate of nature, if they suppose that because the sensual appetites are the first calls of our condition, they are therefore the end and object of it. They are the basis indeed of every thing we possess, but seem entirely subservient to our intellectual enjoyments, those ideas of decency, elegance, and order, which are sure to take place in the mind of man the moment he has provided against the common necessities of nature.

If, therefore, every argument for the improvement of language were waved, but what arises from the superior harmony and beauty of an uniform and well-polished

polished tongue, we might with reason conclude, that such cultivation and improvement is as desirable in this, as any other of the fine arts; but when we consider that perspicuity and ease in the communication of our thoughts are so nearly concerned in the language and delivery we adopt; when we call to mind that ideas are so intimately connected with words as to receive their force and colouring, their delicacy and precision, not only from the verbal expression, but the mode of conveying it, we must then confess, that an improvement in this department of knowledge is not only adding to the elegancies, but the benefits of life.

The importance of precision in language once understood, every thing which has a tendency to promote that precision cannot but be a useful employment. It is the business of the logician to define and appreciate the true value of words, but that of the grammarian to rescue language from solecisms, and prepare it for the orator and metaphysician. There is a lower kind of knowledge, the mechanism of language, which is undoubtedly less liberal than the higher class of arts, but as essential to their perfection as well proportioned materials are to the execution of architecture. The mind of man, which has capacity sufficient to contemplate an universe, is lost in the minute consideration of one of its smallest parts; no wonder, therefore, if the sublimest geniuses have not always been attentive to those subordinate accuracies which seem the proper employment of inferior talents. A mind in pursuit of higher truths would be retarded in its flights by the niceties of grammarians; but grammarians, by whose labours the load of language is lightened, who, by regulating and analogizing the representatives of ideas, make ideas themselves more easily acquired and conveyed, are certainly entitled to a degree of praise, as they, in some measure, contribute to the acquiring of laurels, which by the fate of letters they are doomed never to wear.

Whatever arguments are adduced for a correct and grammatical orthography, by the easiest transition imaginable prove the necessity of a just and accurate pronunciation. The most perfect language in the world is, in some measure, dead, unless delivered with the same precision and propriety with which it is written. The same distinctness is necessary to preserve our words from confusion in speaking as in writing; and, though the latter has the advantage of permanence and exactness, the former is as superior to it as life is to a statue. We need not enter into the question, whether written words are more immediately related to the ideas they represent than the sounds they signify? It is certain, a language might be written without the least reference to pronunciation: but such a language would be as imperfect as a human creature without hearing; for those emotions of the soul which, like the graces of a masterly musician, can only be conveyed by sound, must for ever be excluded from a merely ocular language. Mankind must converse with each other by a less intimate correspondence, and the nicest shades of thought and sentiment must be quite imperceptible. There are few but must observe, how much the import of words depends on their delivery, even in the most familiar intercourse; the very
same

same expressions shall be granting or refusing, approving or suspecting, praising or detracting, according to the tincture of the passion they receive from the tone; and the single words *yes* and *no* are susceptible of a thousand varieties from a various utterance.

To what else can we attribute those astonishing effects which are said to be produced by the oratorical compositions of antiquity? These, like their statues, remain unrivalled by the moderns, but are evident proofs how much of their merit must be placed to the account of their delivery. We hear at this distance but a faint echo of that thunder in Demosthenes which shook the throne of Macedon to its foundations, and are sometimes at a loss for that conviction in the arguments of Cicero, which balanced in the midst of convulsions the tottering republic of Rome. This difference, however, may be easily comprehended by a comparison with the productions of our own times. We all remember when Europe trembled at a speech from the British senate, but the divine rage that inspired the orator was in vain attempted to be traced when the oration sunk upon paper. Another species of elocution, which is more immediately under our notice, will abundantly illustrate this doctrine. Many of our dramatic writings, which warm and astonish us on the stage, are cold and lifeless in the closet. Let those who would see the import of a just delivery, view a character in the hands of a judicious actor. In this point of view they will discover a thousand beauties in the writer which are scarce visible in any other situation. A good actor glows with the same fire that inspires his author; and, like a friendly and judicious critic, heightens by his comment the most striking beauties, and gives a finishing to whatever is imperfect. He strews with flowers and verdure those very passages that are the most barren and desert to a common reader, and selects the finest sense from those which seem to admit of a variety. The judgment of a consummate actor seems to rise to invention, and to constitute him in reality an author; for it is to a discovery of the happiest attitudes of the passions we owe that interesting, but transient expression, which can neither be arrested nor imitated. So that, if the actor is indebted to the writer for the basis and materials of his art, the writer owes a display of his finest feelings to the address and powers of the actor. How many latent beauties have been brought to view on the stage, which lie interred, as it were, in a Johnson and a Fletcher? How many flashes of soul, if the expression will be allowed me, have been struck from the rudest passages of a Shakespeare by the masterly action of a Garrick?

But I find myself by insensible gradations engaged in oratorical and dramatic pronunciation, when the sole point I had in view, was that which may be styled grammatical. As the former, however, so necessarily depends on the latter, as indispensably to share its imperfections and improvements, I hope the digression will be more easily pardoned. To wave every plea from the rostrum or the stage, the common intercourse of life will furnish sufficient reasons for correctness and accuracy

curacy in speaking; and, if the pleasure we derive from it in our most agreeable social communications were entirely overlooked, the necessity of perspicuity in our common, as well as more important concerns, would render a just and accurate pronunciation of the utmost consequence. If written words are liable to be mistaken by a careless orthography, living words are no less subject to ambiguity from improper pronunciation; and a rational intercourse with our fellow-creatures requires nearly the same agreement between the sounds of words and the letters they are composed of, as between the written words and their correspondent ideas.

The French and English critics have been for centuries endeavouring to approximate their orthography and pronunciation, but to very little effect; nor is it very surprising: while two contrary powers are acting on the same body, it will necessarily yield as either of these powers predominate. The correspondence of written words to those sounds which are actually annexed to them, is supposed of the utmost consequence by some writers, while others wish to make the ear submit implicitly to the analogy of derivation. Neither of the parties perhaps is sufficiently attentive to the end of communication while they are so warmly engaged in the means. To make our spelling cringe to every caprice of the ear would soon destroy the very stamina of our tongue; as altering fixed and settled modes of sound or writing, in order to bring us nearer to the languages we derive from, would be turning the stream of language backwards, and inverting the order of nature. Derivative languages, like planets, have their own sphere of attraction; and an attempt to reduce them nearer to their primary tongues, must disturb their peculiar tendencies, and hurt their proper energy and influence.

Equally absurd and impracticable therefore must it be to endeavour either at a change of pronunciation in compliance with orthography and etymology, or to sacrifice these boundaries of language to a precarious temporary pronunciation. The general tendencies of any language to certain inflexions or omissions of sound are so many laws that sufficiently demonstrate their authority by the obedience that is paid them, and these should be held sacred till abrogated by the power that ordained them. Some late innovators in the French language, with Voltaire at their head, have changed the *o* in the verbal termination *ois*, *oit*, and *oient*, into *a*; because more agreeable to pronunciation; but this the authors of the *Encyclopédie* have shown to be contrary to the analogy of the French language, and liable to more exceptions than the established orthography. The English have had as many reformers as the French, but none so successful as Voltaire. In England a judicious critic observes, that not only every author, but every printer has his particular system of orthography; and these systems having sometimes etymology, and sometimes pronunciation for their object, must necessarily disturb and confound the language they endeavoured to correct. Pronunciation is, perhaps, little concerned in the change that has been made in words from the Latin ending in *our*, as *honor*, *favor*, &c. but there are many alterations in orthography which are

not quite so innocent. The words *proceed*, *succeed*, &c. have their last syllables pronounced exactly like the noun *seed*, but if written *procede*, *succede*, &c. these syllables will rhyme with *bead*, *mead*, &c. and though the difference be delicate, it is real. The alteration of *sovereign* to *sevray*, in compliance with Spanish etymology, makes a radical alteration in the sound of the last syllable, and the *e* in *chemist*, instead of the *y* of our forefathers, either changes the pronunciation of the word, or augments the number of our anomalies.

An unnatural partiality to every language but our own, has led us into the most disgraceful imitations of the pronunciation of other nations, and infected the general sound of our language as much as a servile adherence to derivation has its orthography. The French and English languages are as radically different both in their construction and pronunciation as the genius of the people, and yet such is the infatuation of mimicking the nation we affect to despise, that we are daily adopting their words and phrases to the exclusion of our own, which are often more significant, and always more analogical. Dr. Johnson supposes this to arise from that deluge of indifferent translations from the French, which are so greedily read by the under-graduates of a circulating library, who are so numerous and respectable a body in this kingdom, as to have no small share in the legislation of our language. This may undoubtedly be one cause of the corruption of English; but trifling, when compared with the immense importation of foreign words by news papers. To this source we evidently trace the first efforts of folly to distinguish itself by a French expression: the lisping of affected shallow writers are heard first in the news papers, and by a contagious mimicry, to which human nature is prone, become infectious to the language of the whole nation.

But whatever imputations of irregularity our language is branded with, none are so justly founded as those which relate to pronunciation; for though we are daily borrowing words and phrases from the French, yet, thanks to the stubborn genius of our tongue, we are by this means rather painting the face of our language than altering its features. The similitude of languages does not so much consist in making use of the same words as using them in the same manner. The phraseology or vernacular mode of producing the thought has a striking difference; a difference by no means so perceptible when we were less servile imitators in pronunciation. The French of Francis the First's days, and the English of that æra, were nearer each other with respect to idiom than the two languages of the present day. The words we now adopt from the French are so scrupulously distinguished from our own, that it is the strongest mark of vulgarity to pronounce them as if they were English; but so numerous are they grown of late, that we have reduced ourselves to the ridiculous necessity of learning the French as well as English pronunciation, in order to speak our own language with propriety.

The Romans, near the decline of their empire, sacrificed the analogies of their own language to those of the Greek; nor could there be a surer proof of their inferiority.

riority. The English have long been cherishing almost every language but their own; and, but for some geniuses of the first magnitude, must have remained unknown to the world, while the French, with a race of authors confessedly inferior, have, by the cultivation of their language, excited the admiration and envy of Europe. The present age indeed seems sensible of the importance of this point, and has produced grammarians as unequalled as our poets and philosophers. With what Attic taste and geometric rigour has universal grammar been delineated by Harris? With what Herculean labour and classical precision has every word in the English language been selected, distributed, and defined by Johnson? How happily has Lowth joined the talents of a Priscian to those of a Tully in his elegant display of the inaccuracies of our best authors? The more important researches of a Priestley have not deprived us of his attention to grammar; and we have the principles of our own language by Elphinston on a more enlarged and liberal plan than the most polished nations of Europe can produce.

But though every other part of grammar has made a rapid improvement, and we find Johnson and Lowth insensibly operating on the orthography and phraseology of our language, yet its pronunciation, as if too insignificant, has been little noticed by any author except Mr. Elphinston. This gentleman has attempted to reform our pronunciation on the most rational principles; and, by pointing out the analogies of the language, has shown its excellencies and errors in the strongest light; but shows, at the same time, that the analogy of orthoëpy is by much the most abstruse and delicate part of grammar. Custom, which frequently indulges a variety in construction, in pronunciation grows wanton and ungovernable. The plainest analogies are often no boundaries, and inconsistency in pronunciation being less subject to detection than false concord in syntax, the most disgraceful irregularities are daily screened under the specious authority of custom.

Here then we seem arrived at the great law of language, a law which arises out of the very nature of speech, and is perfectly adapted to the ends of social intercourse. As language is no more than the totality of such usages as form a relation between signs and ideas, these relations can only be understood as usage or custom has explained them. So that custom is not only the law of language, but strictly speaking it is language itself. But as the venerable garb of custom is often borrowed to cover the wantonness, or ignorance of innovators, it will be highly necessary to view this legislator in language as closely as possible, that we may not mistake him for novelty or caprice.

If we attend to the sentiments people generally bring with them into verbal disputes, we shall perceive that custom is ever submitted to with reluctance when it violates consistency. It is with a sort of reserve we bow to arbitrary power, and seem to enter a protest in favour of fitness and propriety. The known rule of Horace,

—— usus

—usus

Quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi,

is generally assented to as soon as uttered; but we hardly ever find a person so thoroughly satisfied with it, as not to think an appeal from the tyrant custom lawful when the obvious rights of language are violated. In spite of so great an authority for the despotism of usage, we plainly perceive every person has a sense of order, simplicity, and consistency, that revolts in sentiment, though it acquiesces in practice; and that accurate speakers blush at the sacrifices they make, unless to such custom as time has indelibly sanctified. Nay, the very lazy abettors of mere custom themselves seem sometimes to forget their deity, and dispute, as if a right and wrong in language existed entirely independent on it.

What then is custom in language? Is it the usage of the greater part of speakers, whether good or bad? This has never been asserted by the most sanguine abettors of its authority. Is it the usage of the majority of the studious in schools and colleges, with those of the learned professions: or of those who from their elevated birth and station give laws to the refinements and elegancies of a court? To confine propriety to the latter situation, which is too often the case, seems an injury to the former; who, from their literary acquirements, appear to have a natural right to a share at least in the legislation of language, if not to an absolute sovereignty. The polished attendants on a throne as often depart from simplicity in language, as in dress and manners, and novelty instead of custom, is the *jus et norma loquendi* of a court.

If we trace custom to its origin, we shall find that it is no more than the method adopted by the mind for the attaining and conveying of knowledge. As ideas are associated or separated according to their agreement or difference, so words, which are the types of ideas, are framed nearly in correspondence to them. If the mind forms abstract ideas, we are sure to find in language the same abstraction, as it were, in the form of the words that express them. As ideas uncombined by analogy would be unfit for reasoning, so words, if regulated by no common relations and similitudes, would be incapable of conveying ideas. The necessity therefore of conveying knowledge with precision and dispatch obliges the mind to such combinations in words as are nearly answerable to those combinations of ideas they stand for. Thus every language has certain principles which are common to all, and these principles are as invariable as the nature of things.

As all languages have something in common, so every one has something peculiar. A general analogy runs through every language in the world, as a particular analogy distinguishes each language from the rest. Custom therefore, which is no more than the mind operating by the shortest ways, may, like nature be sometimes diverted from her path, but can never oppose the ends of nature, whose representative she is; and though language, as Quintilian observes, is not
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sent us from heaven perfectly regular and analogical, there is still a sufficient analogy and regularity to convince us with Plato, that its principles are involved in the human mind; and that the analogy we perceive in custom arises from the very nature of language, and not the analogy of language from custom.

Here then is the standard to which the mind ultimately recurs when confounded by the contrarieties of custom: a standard by which custom itself is imperceptibly regulated, and according to its conformity or deviation pronounced right or wrong. But as the great end of language is to communicate knowledge, we find custom always more attentive to the end of communication than the means; and therefore if once clear ideas are annexed to the most irregular expressions, custom has then obtained her principal design; as every alteration in favour of grammar or analogy that is not equally clear, would tend to counteract and defeat it; but as analogy and grammar are but other words for perspicuity, when once this perspicuity is secured, that mode of expression is certainly the best which is most agreeable to grammar and analogy. This seems to draw the line between that affected ease which marks the literary fop, and the stiff precision of the tasteless pedant; for as no good writer or speaker would hazard being obscure for the sake of such analogies as are not received, so none would prefer irregular and barbarous construction when the regular is equally understood. If prescription in language be so sacred as not to admit of the least alteration, there is an end to all improvement, and Dr. Lowth has miserably employed his time in pointing out the improprieties of our most celebrated authors; but if our reason was given us to co-operate with nature, we ought to take all occasions to render our language more agreeable to her general intention, by purging it of such anomalies as frustrate in some degree the very end and design of it. At this point however the difficulty begins.

If making ourselves intelligible by the shortest and least equivocal means were the sole end of language, most of our verbal criticism would be at an end; but unfortunately for the future fame of authors, expressions must not only be clear and concise, but fashionable; and as neither novelty nor antiquity must enter into the phraseology of perfect composition, so elegant pronunciation must be such as exactly suits the present mode, without the least tincture of either of these extremes. Pope has happily comprised what the public expect from us in four lines,

In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold,

Alike fantastic if too new or old:

Be not the first by whom the new are tried,

Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

Essay on Crit.

But, to pursue the simile; as no custom can alter the nature of things, or make all fashions in dress equally suitable to the human figure; so every mode of expression, though equally in vogue, is not equally agreeable to the genius of a language: but as it is the fate of language and dress to be slaves to the reigning

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mode,

mode, even the abuses of custom must be submitted to, to avoid singularity. Good taste however in both cases shows a superiority to mere custom, when she seems the most implicitly to bow to it; for as the secret of dressing gracefully consists in those slender variations that do not seem to desert the fashion, and yet approach nearer to the complexion and import of the countenance, so a correctness and delicacy of expression lies in that gentle departure from the vices of custom, which shows we are neither ignorant of the laws of our language, nor too solicitously employed about words.

Language then is both dependent and independent on custom. There are certain principles common to all languages which no custom can subvert; these principles may be called primary: there are others that form the particular and distinguishing character of each language, and which, though not entirely out of the power of custom, are sufficiently permanent to be considered as independent on it; these may be called secondary principles. Thus the Chinese and savage languages must have nouns and verbs, with their different adjuncts, to express diversity of number, time, or situation, and though these adjuncts or secondary principles partake of that variety which is observable in every adventitious circumstance in nature, they have still a general uniform tendency that terminates in a system, and which may be justly called the particular genius of each language.

Besides these parts of language which are permanent and durable, there is a third division of words, which consists of those that are floating on the surface of almost every living language, and form the most equivocal and difficult part of them: these are such as custom has not worn into uniform usage, and are therefore productive of a diversity which is both ridiculous and embarrassing; not that this part of language is so very dubious in its nature as to be entirely unrelated to the more regular and systematic parts of speech. There are few words which are not more akin to one analogy than another, and the whole difficulty lies in tracing out the relation. This however is far from being unsurmountable, and it is scarcely to be doubted that if the analogies of the language were sufficiently known, and so near at hand as to be applicable on inspection to every word; I say, if this were the case, it is highly probable that not only many words which are wavering between contrary usages, but many which are fixed by custom to an improper pronunciation, would by degrees grow regular and analogical; and those which are already so would be secured in their purity by a knowledge of their regularity and analogy.

If the analogies of language had been better understood, it is scarcely conceivable that so many words in polite use should be so differently pronounced by the best speakers. *Orthography, advertisement, satiety, conversant, knowledge, academy, authority*, and a thousand others, are daily fluctuating between contrary usages, without the least prospect of being fixed either by custom or analogy. The ear, always partial to that sound which it is most accustomed to, must ever fancy a propriety in one mode of pronunciation, without any proof of its being preferable

pronounce the same word or syllable in a different manner, and as neither of these manners offend the ear, they are at a loss to which they shall give the preference. A display of the general tendencies of the language would immediately remove this uncertainty, and on this view of the variety, we should discover a fitness in one mode of speaking that before was scarcely perceptible. Let us take a few examples:

A person who has but a confused idea from the ear of the repetition of accent in some of our longer polysyllables, will frequently waver in his pronunciation of the first syllables of words where the accent is on the third. Thus *resurrection*, *recollection*, *preposition*, &c. are without hesitation pronounced as if divided into *res-ur-rec-tion*, *rec-ol-lec-tion*, *prep-o-si-tion*; but *recantation*, *relaxation*, *predilection*, &c. are frequently heard as if divided into *re-can-ta-tion*, *re-lax-a-tion*, *pre-di-lec-tion*. At the first sight of these words we are tempted to pronounce the preposition in one syllable, as supposing that mode to convey more distinctly each part of the word; but custom at large, the best interpreter of nature, soon lets us see that these prepositions coalesce with the word they are prefixed to, for reasons greatly superior to those which present themselves at first. If we observe the tendency of pronunciation with respect to inseparable prepositions, we shall find that compound words which we adopt whole from other languages we consider as radicals, and pronounce without any respect to their component parts; but those compounds which we form ourselves, retain the traces of their formation in the distinction which is observable between the prepositive and radical part of the word. Thus *predilection*, *recantation*, *relaxation*, &c. coming compounded to us from the Latin, ought undoubtedly to sink the preposition in the root, while *re-commit*, *re-conquer*, &c. being compounds of our own, must preserve it; but as many words, though formed on Latin analogy, are not actually found compounded in the best authors of antiquity, and many of these words have either been adopted from the latter Latin, or received from the Latin through the French, we shall find no criterion out of our own tongue to settle this pronunciation of the prepositions, and must therefore view the oeconomy of our language in this respect a little more closely.

When we adopt the Latin *pre* and *re*, and form compounds with them in English, they are intended to mark priority of time or iteration of action. When the word to which they are prefixed is of Saxon original, or so Anglicised from the Latin or French as to be used in the same sense when single as when compounded, here the preposition is distinguished from the root of the word by a prolongation of the vowel that terminates it: but if the word be either from the Latin, or in the Latin analogy of formation, and so dependent on the preposition as not to be allowably used without it, then the preposition shortens the vowel, and strikes in with the root of the word so as to form one whole undistinguished compound. Or, in other words, where the compound retains the primary sense of the simples, and the parts of the word are the same in every respect, both in and out of composition, then the preposition is pronounced in a distinct syllable; but when the

compound

compound departs ever so little from the literal sense of the simples, the same departure is observable in the pronunciation; for the word is then considered as independent on its parts, and the preposition is mingled with the word, and with respect to sound entirely lost in it. That this is quite agreeable to the nature of the language, appears from the short pronunciation of the vowel in the first of *prelate*, *prologue*, *prelude*, &c. as if divided into *prel-ate*, *prol-ogue*, *prel-ude*, &c. but this manner of pronouncing these words depending on reasons not very obvious, the reader must be referred for satisfaction on this point to the article *orthography* at the latter end of this Plan. In the mean time, it will be necessary to observe, that the foregoing rules suppose a double accent on polysyllables, and that when the principal accent is on the third syllable there is always a subordinate accent on the first. This is agreeable to the opinion of our best grammarians, and is a clue to the most puzzling intricacies of pronunciation, so that in forming a judgment of the propriety of these observations, the nicest care must be taken not to confound those prepositions which are under the primary and secondary accent, as it may be called, with those which immediately precede the stress, for *preclude*, *pretend*, &c. are under a very different predicament from *prologue*, *preposition*, &c.

The same uncertainty of pronunciation may be noticed in the sound of *x* and *s* in the prepositives *ex* and *dis*. *Exact* assumes the *x* in the composition of *x*, as if the word were written *egzact*, while the same letter in *exercise* preserves the sound of *x* pure or hissing. The same may be observed of the *s* in *disability* and *disable*, where the first preserves the *s* pure as in the first syllable of *distance*, while the last is sounded as if written *dizable*. Here every ear agrees, and a different pronunciation would infallibly mark a bad speaker; but in *exile*, *exit*, *exanimate*, *disbelief*, *dislike*, *disjoin*, &c. we hear the sharp or flat sound of *s*, that is, the *s* pronounced pure or impure, without any apparent distinction; and yet it is certain from the general tendency of the sound of *x* or *s* in this situation, that there is a choice in the pronunciation of these letters, and that one sound is more agreeable to the common harmony of the language than the other. The only method of discovering which of these is the preferable sound, is to compare the language with itself; and, as in other analogies, to explain the obscure by the clear. On running our eye over the first syllables of words, beginning with *ex* and *dis*, we immediately find a key to the difficulty; for if either the principal or secondary accent be on these inseparable prepositions, the *x* or *s* will then be pure or hissing; and if the accent be on the second syllable, the *x* or *s* will be pure or impure, according to the nature of the consecutive letter. That is, if a sharp mute, as *p*, *t*, &c. succeed, the preceding *s* or *x* must be pronounced sharp or hissing; but if a flat mute, as *b*, *d*, &c. or a vowel or liquid begin the next syllable, the foregoing *x* or *s* must be sounded like *x*. *Dismal*, which seems an objection to the first part of this rule, in reality confirms it; for the first syllable *dis* in this word is not a preposition, the word coming from the two Latin words *dies malus*. The preposition *mis* indeed does not

come under these rules, as the *s* in this syllable never falls into the *x*, whether under the accent or not; but this is a prepositive of our own, and not borrowed from the Latin as is the case with *ex* and *dis*, and in our own compounds we do not confound the sound of the simples as in those we borrow from others. This is evident from what has been before observed of the Latin preposition *pre*, and is a manifest proof of the extent and certainty of the rule. Thus a fitness and propriety arises out of the midst of confusion, and by only consulting the tendency of our language, we improve it.

So great a part of our language being unsettled by custom, and the uniformity that discovered itself on a cursory inspection only, gave the first hint of the Plan here offered to the public. Being engaged in the instruction of youth, I could not content myself with answering their questions on pronunciation by a constant repetition of the word *custom*, and this put me on tracing the analogies of this part of language, so as to be able to show where custom had terminated in rules and maxims, and where she had wandered from the line she herself may be said to have drawn.

The pronunciation of language, like its signification, I apprehended to be a system of sounds acknowledged by the ear for the representation of words or ideas; and that these sounds, like the words and ideas they stand for, must necessarily be subject to such regulations as fitted them for the communication of knowledge. These regulations then were the objects of enquiry, as a knowledge of them would infallibly lead to the tendency and genius of the language; but as these could only be discovered by an examination of all those oral facts, as words may be called, that form the totality of a language, I plainly perceived that it was necessary to enumerate and compare these facts, in order to ascertain the regulations they were under; every word therefore, nay every syllable, if the comparison be not too hyperbolical, I found must be considered as an experiment in natural philosophy, from which general laws are deducible; or, in the language of logic, as an individual under some common nature, to which it might be referred for its specific quality. The association and arrangement then of such oral facts, as should bring every similar syllable together, seemed the only method of discovering the general bent and tendency of the language. This I knew must be an Herculean labour, for it was not sufficient to bring similar combinations of letters together, to understand the general rule of pronouncing them; the accent I found must be taken into the account, and this not only as affecting one syllable, but in reality as influencing every part of the word, either by its absence or repetition. Difficult then, and seemingly impossible as this selection and association appeared, I found it absolutely necessary to a perfect view of the tendencies of the whole; and, therefore, did not hesitate a moment to undertake it, in order to acquire the specific quality, if I may call it so, of every syllable in the language.

I need not enlarge on the insupportable fatigue of such an undertaking; the reader's imagination will readily conceive the extent and intricacy of the enquiry.

The

The beginning, however, was most irksome. Light broke in by-degrees, that facilitated the progress. Ambiguities, by being classed and compared, explained each other, and almost every obscurity vanished before the alphabet was exhausted. Syllabication, which has so much embarrassed those who have strove to unite etymology and pronunciation, when directed by the sound and accent, became easy and obvious; and as various truths mutually illustrate each other, so composition and resolution, when guided by accent, coincided in determining the quantity of the vowel as accent in its turn became the unerring index to a just and uniform division of syllables. This prospect and retrospect of the whole language in its minutest parts, afforded a key to infinite difficulties, and furnished me with such analogies as enabled me, not only to decide peremptorily where custom was doubtful, but to arraign even the authority of custom itself when it was too wantonly exercised. In short, so much consistency and regularity appeared at the bottom of our pronunciation in the course of this inspection, that, immense as the labour was, I thought my pains amply rewarded by the satisfaction it afforded me.

Struck with the idea of so much regularity in the most irregular part of language, my next wish was to convey it to others in such a manner as to become useful. Every dictionary I saw was prefaced with the pompous assurance of the accentuation of every word according to the politest usage; but not one had formed an idea of giving such reasons for the pronunciation of every word as might satisfy us, if custom should be equivocal. By the inspection of these dictionaries, one would suppose there was not a word in the whole language that was not unalterably fixed in its sound, till we come to compare them; and then we find these oracles differ so widely among themselves, that we are left in the darkest suspense to which of these polite usages we should incline; and though we have one dictionary whose authority in this matter is infinitely superior to every other, yet as the author professedly gave pronunciation the least part of his attention, and a very considerable alteration has taken place in the language, perhaps in consequence of the improvement it has received from this very dictionary, a revival of this part of our tongue seemed absolutely necessary, that while we write with an elegant uniformity, we may not speak with barbarous variety.

While I was thus indulging the vanity of a discovery in letters, a thousand agreeable visions presented themselves, which I in vain strove to realize. The idea of a dictionary that to every word, which admitted of the least variety, should either annex such explications of its sound, or refer to such explications as would determine its pronunciation, as far as analogy or consistency could determine it, was rather the object of my wishes than expectations. And yet such a scheme, visionary as it was, seemed the only expedient for fixing the language in its pronunciation, as far as it was capable of being fixed; for analogy and consistency being the basis of language, as well as every other system of knowledge, on this foundation

foundation custom must rest, or for ever be vague and desultory. Not that I was so romantic as to imagine any display of the analogies would alter the fixed and settled modes of speaking, or even recover us from those irregularities which time and authority had indelibly stamped on us. All I expected from such an improvement, was preventing that vicious change which we see daily creeping in upon us; drawing those words that are variously pronounced to the side of analogy, and inclining any future alterations that may be made to what is most agreeable to the genius or general turn of the language.

The idea of such a dictionary seemed to promise the same satisfaction with respect to particular words as parts of a language, that a dictionary of sciences does with respect to such things as form parts of general knowledge. I often with regret reflected, that we had not a dictionary of the pronunciation of words, that, like other dictionaries, might lead us from any given part to the whole; and imagined that as we may know the definition and difference of an isosceles and scalenous triangle by inspection, and without studying the Elements of Euclid, we might in the same manner understand the rules and reasons for the pronunciation of single words without being obliged to read over a whole body of orthoëpy. Such a dictionary, I fancied, would invite us to the study of our pronunciation, by the immediate satisfaction we might receive in the point we had in view, and lay such a foundation for the investigation of every word, as would be easily susceptible of improvement, and productive of the most lasting advantages to the language.

Flattering and practicable as the first prospect of such a work appeared, a pursuit of the thought soon presented such mountains, wilds, and labyrinths, as persuaded me I had been wandering on enchanted ground, and grasping at phantoms that vanished from my touch; for though I was sufficiently convinced of the existence of such rules and analogies as would throw prodigious light on the disputable part of our pronunciation, the method of conveying these rules to every word and syllable without endless repetition was the mystery. To repeat that explication in every word, which was common to a thousand, was impossible on the face of it. To fix a common mark upon every letter and syllable intended to be explained, and to suppose the inspector pre-acquainted with the intention of these marks, and that part of the work to which these applications were referred would certainly render the execution less laborious, but this I imagined would be a radical defect. Every dictionary I supposed should be sufficient to itself, without recurring to preliminary discourses to make it intelligible. The sole intent of the dictionary of any science appeared to be the facility of discovering the whole by an easy and alphabetical inspection into every part, and calculated rather for an occasional view of separate parts, than an analytical prospect of the whole body; and to say nothing of any other defects to which affixing marks are liable, the ease with which one may be mistaken for another both by printer and author, makes the reader eternally insecure. Marks are very sufficient to acquaint us with the quantity of a Latin syllable, as in a *Gradus* they

they are always accompanied with quotations from authors that illustrate them, and in a great measure render the marks needless; but in a work of this kind, where not only the pronunciation of words and syllables, but the rules and reasons for that pronunciation are to be conveyed, a more suitable and explicit mode of conveyance must be adopted; for as syllables are sometimes under various predicaments, as the sound of their letters, their position with respect to accent, the varieties to which these are sometimes subject, and the analogies that render one of these varieties preferable to another; as all these considerations sometimes unite on the same syllable, and all are to be distinctly noticed, here marks seem unequal to the task; for in order to refer distinctly to every explanation they must be so multiplied and diversified as would render a laborious study of them a pre-requisite to a knowledge of their use.

In short, after weighing and comparing every possible method with the utmost care and circumspection, none appeared so eligible as the association of similar syllables by a reference to each other; and where a series of syllables were perfectly alike, to make choice of one as the representative of the rest. This I knew would enable me to say every thing that was requisite on the syllable to be explained, and by referring every similar syllable to this, I at once explained the whole class: but this, however easy in theory, was involved in a thousand difficulties when reduced to practice. Had I been less scrupulous in defining the pronunciation of words, I might have spared infinite trouble. I could not content myself with the common resource of grammarians, who excuse themselves from explaining sounds by calling them obscure: this obscure sound confessedly resembles some one sound more than others, and if the nearest resemblance can be given, the explanation of this sound is so much nearer one that is clear and distinct, and consequently more definite and intelligible.

Let us take an example: unaccented vowels in final syllables terminated by a consonant, but especially *r*, have an obscure sound that nearly approaches the short *u*. Thus *liar*, *lier*, *mayor*, *martyr*, &c. provided the accent were carefully retained on the first syllable, might be written and pronounced *liur*, *liur*, *mayur*, *matur*, &c. without any perceptible change in the sound of the words; nor can any letter be so properly substituted to point out this obscure sound to foreigners or provincials as that here made use of. Delicate ears may fancy as many differences as they please in the last syllables of these words, but as nothing but a distinct and permanent sound can convey any idea of these differences, let them try if they can dwell on the radical sounds of the *a*, *e*, *o*, and *y*, in these words without departing from common and received pronunciation. This approximation however I did not consider as exempting me from the task of showing the radical sound of these letters, or that which they would have if the accent were on them, as both these seemed necessary to give a complete idea of the syllable.

On the contrary, vowels immediately before the accent have a tendency to lengthen, as in *e-vent*, *o-bey*, *u-nite*, &c. Now though the *u* in *unite* is ever pronounced as distinctly as when the accent is on it in *unit*; yet the *e* in *event*, and the *o* in *obey*, are in rapid pronunciation liable to a small degree of obscurity; but this obscurity immediately vanishes at the approach of the least precision or solemnity; and the radical sound of these vowels, or that to which they may be reduced by being dwelt on, is their long open sound; for as it would be in vain to think of painting distinctly the delicate shades of colloquial pronunciation where the accent is not concerned, the only method to convey any idea of them, must be to give that sound which approximates the nearest, and which by being dwelt on will admit of distinct perception and comparison; for the obscure sound, as it is called, would in this place be but ill described, as in our modern dictionaries, by likening it to the short sound of those vowels, as if the words were spelled *ev-vent*, *ob-bey*, &c. The only sound therefore which seems a proper index to the vowels in question is that long open sound heard in *even*, *open*, &c. these we can fully conceive and distinguish from every other; and every critical ear will grant a greater propriety, even if they are pronounced as long and open as when the accent is on them, than as if shortened by being pronounced close to the consonant: for that delicate abatement of sound in easy pronunciation which distinguishes elegant speakers, can only be conveyed by pronunciation itself; a sound, which is too fugitive to be arrested for examination, and which eludes the nicest organs that attempt to seize and ascertain it.

In order therefore to exhibit a perfect view of the pronunciation of every word, I found it necessary to consider the syllables of which it was composed either as distinctly or obscurely, as solemnly or familiarly pronounced. With respect to the obscurity of vowels, or that departure from their radical sound which is called colloquial, I found no vowels subject to it but such as were not under the accent, and great part of these too I perceived might be pronounced as distinctly and agreeably to the radical sound of the letters as if the accent were on them; and that there was no unaccented vowel however obscure but what might be likened to some distinct permanent sound to which it evidently tended; but as this tendency could not be called perfectly similar, it was necessary to annex to these vowels their radical and distinct as well as colloquial sound. Solemn and familiar pronunciation I found exactly agreed in the sound of all those syllables that were accented, and in multitudes that were not so; for no solemnity I saw would authorize the radical sound of some unaccented vowels, nor any familiarity but what was culpable, admit the least abatement of distinctness in such as were accented; so that the terms solemn and familiar pronunciation, when used as equivalent to distinct and obscure, I found were confused and inaccurate; and that the solemn pronunciation which did not swell into pedantry, differed but in very few instances from the colloquial which did not descend to vulgarity. Small however as this difference was, it was indispensably

penably necessary to take notice of it when it occurred, that the boundaries of these dialects, if they may be called so, might be precisely marked.

But not only the sounds of letters were to be conveyed with distinctness and precision, the accent must also be fixed according to the purest usage, and where this was various, the genius and tendency of language must be consulted and exhibited. The common analogy of dissyllable nouns and verbs, the former having the accent on the first and the latter on the last syllable, must be carefully pointed out wherever it occurred, and any deviations from this rule as far as possible accounted for. Thus the substantives *ally* and *survey* were both till very lately accented on the last syllable, yet the greatest personage, as well as the most accurate pronouncer of English in the kingdom, places the accent on the first of *ally* when a noun, and the best speakers in the English senate follow the example in *survey*. This is reducing these words to the analogy of their several classes, but violating another rule respecting the sound of their last syllable; for if we examine the terminations in *y* and *ey*, when unaccented, we shall find them uniformly sink into the sound of *e*, as in *valley*, *alley*, *fally*, *tally*, &c. So that *al'ly* and *sur'vey* with the accent on the first syllable break the general rule of pronouncing final syllables of this form, and to avoid this perhaps was the reason of their being pronounced otherwise formerly. But when we attend to the more important laws of language, we shall find this alteration perfectly agreeable to good sense. In English, contrary to the analogy of the learned languages, nouns are frequently changed into verbs, and verbs into nouns, without any alteration in their form; and as a distinction of these parts of speech is necessary to avoid obscurity, it is certainly more agreeable to solid criticism to indulge a tendency where sense than where sound only is concerned. Thus we see every general propensity of a language is directed by utility, and this diversity of accent in dissyllable nouns and verbs is a sort of compensation for the want of different forms; besides, keeping the accent on the last syllable of such a number of words, in some measure counteracts the too great tendency of our language to a barytone accentuation.

By this specimen the reader may judge of the weight and intricacy of the task I was undertaking, and what little prospect I had of ever seeing an end to my labour; but the same investigation that showed me the extent and perplexities of my scheme, discovered the clue to prevent my being lost in it. Language, from a minute inspection of it, appeared much more regular than I had imagined. By distinguishing general rules from exceptions, I saw a thousand difficulties vanish, which made a frightful appearance when confused and unseparated. Like the different species of animals in the ark of Noah, the deviations of language seem innumerable until we reckon them, and then we are surprised at their paucity.

The only difficulty that remained was how to convey the sound of every word in such a manner as to make it impossible for an Englishman to mistake one sound for another. In the first place, I saw it necessary to form an alphabet of all the possible

possible sounds of every letter, and a table of diphthongs, comprehending the various sounds of every possible combination of vowels, though apparently these first principles stood in need of some known and acknowledged sounds to realize and determine their power.

Now, the most permanent sounds in the language, and those which were readiest for the office of explaining others, I conceived to be the monosyllables. These when classed together so as perfectly to rhyme, I looked on as the hinges of pronunciation. I imagined if these principles of language were but carefully associated according to their similar sounds, they would mutually fix and illustrate each other. I saw plainly that letters, in order to have their sounds defined and distinguished, were constantly referred to familiar monosyllables, and that beyond these it was impossible to go, unless into the obscurities of organic formation.

Monosyllables then as the stamina of language were first to be selected and compared, that such as were perfect rhymes might be classed together, and one of the series referred to the alphabet of powers for the sound of all its letters; this arrangement at once determined the sound of a whole series of monosyllables, and fitted them for the office of explaining compounds, or words that were divisible into parts. This division was the next operation; and as conveying the precise sound of words was the sole object of it, Dr. Lowth's advice was implicitly followed, and the words dissolved into parts, "as they are naturally divided in a right pronunciation, without regard to their derivation, or the possible combination of consonants at the beginning of a syllable."

For if the sound of the word *etymology* were to be conveyed, and we should divide the word into the syllables *e-ty-mo-lo-gy*, as it is generally divided, should we by this division give the least idea of the sound of the middle syllable on which the accent is placed? Would not this division of the word be rather an impediment to its pronunciation than a help? Indisputably. The slightest reflection on the sound of these syllables when united will make us prefer their division into *et-y-mol-o-gy*. As here, not only the accented vowel has its true quantity pointed out, but that in the first syllable also, which by the accent called secondary, is as much shortened and united in sound to the succeeding consonant, as the *e* in the third.

Words thus divided, are next to be explained as in other dictionaries, after which, every syllable must be separately ascertained in its sound beyond the possibility of a mistake. Thus the first syllable of *etymology* is said to rhyme with the noun *bet*, and to be short, because it has the secondary accent on it, with references to such articles as treat fully on the shortening power of this accent: *y* is said to be the fourth sound of that letter in the Alphabet of Powers, rhyming with the word *sea*: *mol* is rhymed with the monosyllables *doll*, *loll*, &c. and *ogy* being a termination common to a numerous class of words, is referred to the two last syllables of *apology*, where the sound of the *o*, immediately following the accent, is at large discussed, the *g* shewn to be soft and equivalent, to *j*, and the syllable *gy* to rhyme

rhyme with *sea*. Here also notice is taken of the quality of this termination, which is always to throw the accent back on the preceding syllable, and for this reason, may not very improperly be called enclitical.

Thus was every difficulty either obviated or lessened, and perseverance had at length formed the whole mass of pronunciation into something like a system, when I recollected a passage in Dr. Johnson's Grammar prefixed to his Dictionary, which seemed to preclude the very work I had undertaken. "Most of the writers of English grammar, says the Doctor, have given long tables of words pronounced otherwise than they are written, and seem not sufficiently to have considered, that of English, as of all living tongues, there is a double pronunciation, one cursory and colloquial, the other regular and solemn. The cursory pronunciation is always vague and uncertain, being made different in different mouths by negligence, unskilfulness, or affectation. The solemn pronunciation, though by no means immutable and permanent, is yet always less remote from the orthography, and less liable to capricious innovation. They have however generally formed their tables according to the cursory speech of those with whom they happened to converse; and concluding that the whole nation combines to vitiate language in one manner, have often established the jargon of the lowest of the people as the model of speech."

"For pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words."

The veneration I paid to the learning and abilities of this gentleman made me at first suspect I had been cherishing a phantom, and that no directions for the pronunciation of words could possibly be of any service; on a second reading however I found my fears vanish: I saw it would be doing great injustice to Dr. Johnson to suppose that he meant to exclude all possibility of conveying the actual pronunciation of many words that depart manifestly from their orthography, or of those that are written alike and pronounced differently, and inversely. He has marked these differences with great propriety himself in many places of his dictionary, particularly under the words *bow* to shoot with, and *bow* an act of reverence; and it is greatly to be regretted, that he has not extended these remarks farther. It was impossible therefore he could suppose that because the almost imperceptible glances of colloquial pronunciation were not to be caught and described by the pen, therefore the very perceptible difference between the final syllables of *finite* and *infinite* could not be sufficiently delineated. Cannot we show the different sounds of the monosyllable *full*, and the first of *fulminate*, because in some very few instances solemnity will authorize a different pronunciation from familiarity? Besides, that colloquial pronunciation which is perfect is so much the language of solemn pronunciation, that perhaps there is no more

difference than between the same pictures painted to be viewed near and at a distance. The symmetry in both is exactly the same, and the distinction lies only in the colouring. The English language in this respect seems to have a great superiority over the French, which pronounces many letters in the poetic and solemn style that are wholly silent in the prosaic and familiar. But if a solemn and familiar pronunciation really exists in our language, is it not the business of a grammarian to mark both? And if he cannot possibly point out the precise sound of unaccented syllables, (for these only are liable to obscurity) he may however give those sounds to which they approach the nearest, and by this means approximate, though he can never arrive at perfection.

It cannot however be denied that there is too much reason for Dr. Johnson's complaint. Our shops swarm with books whose titles announce a standard for pronunciation, and when we open them, we find nothing but a barbarous orthography and a corrupt pronunciation; but this does not prove that every attempt to convey the sound of words that differs from the spelling is equally defective, or that the written words are the only *criteria* of pronunciation. The old Saxon guttural *gb* is still preserved with many other reliques of ancient English among the Scotch and the northern inhabitants of England; but shall we, because it is nearer the orthography, revive the exploded guttural sound in *high, nigh, light, might, &c.* or shall we, because the inhabitants of Scotland and Ireland, in a great many instances, approach nearer to the written words than the English themselves: shall we, I say, for this reason, adopt the peculiarities of these kingdoms, and account those the best speakers who abound the most in them? Certain it is, the written words will ever be considered by men of sense as the great outlines of pronunciation, and what must necessarily convey a general idea of the whole; but the hand of custom alone being capable of filling up and softening the parts, the mere letters themselves must often be considered as cyphers; for the same good sense which directs us to the written words, when usage is obscure or uncertain, will teach us entirely to neglect them when custom is clear and decisive. I plainly perceived, therefore, that I should wrong the sense of Dr. Johnson's general rule of pronunciation, if I understood it to mean any more than that adherence to the written words which can only take place when custom has not plainly determined otherwise; for unfortunately for the English language, its orthography and pronunciation are so widely different, that Dr. Watts and Dr. Jones lay it down as a maxim in their treatises on spelling, that all words which can be sounded different ways, must be written according to that sound which is most distant from the true pronunciation.

The deservedly extensive influence of Dr. Johnson's opinion made me the more careful to obviate any mistake in his sense, nor was I a little relieved at finding myself not included in his censure. I pretended to no sort of credit in pronunciation but

but what my reasons allowed me, nor had I the most distant idea of deciding as a judge in a case of so much delicacy and importance. I only assumed the part of an advocate to plead the cause of analogy and consistency, and where custom was either silent or dubious, to tempt the lovers of their language to incline to the side of propriety; so that my design was merely to give a history of pronunciation, and a register of its present state; and where the authority of dictionaries or public speakers were found to differ, to endeavour to give such a display of the analogies of the language as would enable every inspector to decide for himself. The abilities requisite for a work of this kind ought certainly to make me blush, if the novelty of it did not promise a thousand allowances from the distinguishing public, who, though they generally owe the perfection of useful works to the joint concurrence of societies, are often indebted for their invention to an obscure individual.

When I reflected on the small satisfaction we could receive on this subject from works already published, even an attempt at an improvement was flattered with success. Pronunciation, considered as a science, I saw was generally treated with contempt, and when authors condescended to give rules, it was always in the analytic way. A few general rules were laid down as applicable to particular words, and a few instances given where these rules take place, but the application of them to every other word was left entirely to the sagacity of the learner; who, in order to find out those rules that related to the pronunciation of a particular word, had no resource but reading a whole treatise with such care as to discover, by analogy, every single word referred to in the general rule; so that the few general rules, and those very few and very general indeed, which are given in spelling books and grammars, and sometimes prefixed to dictionaries, must be studied as a science before they can be extended to particular words, and therefore it is no wonder if so little attention is paid to them.

The plan I have to offer aims at a quite opposite method; that is, it proceeds synthetically from parts to the whole. Instead of supposing the inspector pre-acquainted with rules which are to direct him in his reasonings on every particular word, every word directs to such rules as relate to every part of its pronunciation. It will readily occur, on the slightest consideration, that if the former method had been cultivated much beyond its present point, it must still be considerably inferior to the latter, where the object of enquiry is not so much a whole language as particular words: for instead of giving rules which could never be brought down to every particular instance, an inverted but a natural order is adopted, which, by finding out the word, leads us to every rule that concerns the pronunciation of it. Thus, if I would know whether the *s* in *conclusive* is pronounced as an *s* pure or an *z*, I look at the word, and find not only that the former is the *s* in this word, but that every adjective of a similar termination has the sharp or hissing *s*, and that the

reason

reason of it seems founded on that distinction which custom has almost invariably made between the sounds of this letter in the termination of a noun and a verb.

In order to give a fuller idea of the manner of explaining words and reasoning on them, I shall make an extract of one which is subject to a double pronunciation, and submit it to the judgment of the reader.

ORTHOGRAPHY.

OR-THOG'RA-PHY. *s.* (A system of spelling; spelling with propriety.)

Or. as the conjunction *or*. (under which word the sound of *o* is explained.)

thog. *th.* as in *thank*, rhymes *bog*. (under *thank* the sharp sound of *th* is explained.)

ra. as *a* in *ide-a*, articulated by *r*. (under *idea* the *a* following the accent is explained.)

phy. *ph.* as in *physic*, rhymes *sea*. (under *physic*, *ph* is shewn to be sounded like *f*.)

The unclassical propensity we have to place the accent on polysyllables as near the beginning as possible, and the temptation we are under to discover our knowledge of the component parts of words, are very apt to betray us into a different accentuation of the word *orthography* from that which is here given. We not unfrequently hear the accent placed on the first syllable; and it is nothing but a certain compactness or unity of sound in the present mode of accentuation that has worn it into use. Those words, which are derived from the Greek, and are compounded of *λόγος*, have universally given into this enclitical accentuation, if I may call it so, from the common word *apology* to the learned combination *physicotheology*. The same reason appears for a similar pronunciation of all those compounded of *γράφω*, which is that by placing the accent on the antepenultimate *og*, the word is pronounced as one, and therefore more agreeably to that unity of idea suggested by the word, than if the stress were placed on the first and third syllables; for by dividing the accentual force on *ortho* and *graphy*, we give the word the sound and appearance of an adjective and a substantive, not sufficiently united to convey at once one complex idea. It is certain, however, that at first sight, the most plausible reasoning in the world seems to lie against the accentuation here given. When we place the stress on the first syllable, say our opponents, we indulge our own language in its favourite accent, and give a kind of subordinate stress to the third syllable *graph*. Thus the word is divided as it were into its primitives, *ὀρθός* and *γράφω*, and those distinct ideas it contains are by this means conveyed, which must necessarily be confounded by the contrary mode; and that pronunciation of compounds, say they, must certainly be the best which best preserves the import of its simples. Nothing can be more specious than this reasoning, till we look a little higher than language, and consider its object; we shall then discover, that in uniting two words under one accent, so as to form one compound term, we do but imitate the superior operations of the mind,

mind, which, in order to collect and convey knowledge, unite several simple ideas into one word. "The end of language," says Mr. Locke, "is by short sounds to signify with ease and dispatch general conceptions, wherein not only abundance of particulars are contained, but also a great variety of independent ideas are collected into one complex one, and that which holds these different parts together in the unity of one complex idea, is the word we annex to it. For the connexion between the loose parts of those complex ideas being made by the mind, this union which has no particular foundation in nature, would cease again were there not something that did as it were hold it together and keep the parts from scattering; though, therefore, it be the mind that makes the collection, 'tis the name which is as it were the knot which ties them fast together." This reasoning, with respect to words and ideas, is so exactly applicable to accent and words, that we need but change the names to have an argument in form for that accentuation which unites the different parts of a word under one forcible pressure of the voice; for, as Mr. Locke continues, "Men, in framing ideas, seek more the convenience of language and quick dispatch by short and comprehensive signs, than the true and precise nature of things, and, therefore, he who has made a complex idea of a body with life, sense, and motion, with a faculty of reason joined to it, need but use the short monosyllable, man, to express all particulars that correspond to that complex idea." So it may be subjoined, that in framing words for the purpose of immediate communication, the end of this communication is best answered by such a pronunciation as unites simples into one compound, and at the same time renders the compound as much a simple as possible: but it is evident that this is done by no mode of accentuation but that here adopted in the word orthography; and therefore that this accentuation, without insisting on its superior harmony, must best answer the great end of language.

If a work of this kind seems to promise utility, and the few specimens given of it make a favourable impression, the author will not hesitate a moment to commit it to the press, and consign it to the candor of the public; but though the fascination of a new discovery has for years confined him to the magic circle of this single subject, the enchantment is not strong enough to make him risque a publication of this bulk and expence on the countenance and encouragement of a few partial friends and acquaintance. If the public, therefore, by their coldness, sufficiently advertise him of the futility of his project, he is ready to consign to oblivion what is unworthy of their notice, and acquiesce in the sentence of his country.

But, however resigned the author may be to the decision of the public, he does not pretend to be stoic enough to expect it with indifference. As doing the least service to his country would afford him the sincerest pleasure, his disappointment

pointment cannot but be attended with regret. Indeed the general attention so justly paid to the cultivation of our language within these few years affords a favourable opportunity to every adventurer; and if any country on earth ought to encourage the melioration of its language, it is our's. Perhaps it is in some measure to our language we owe such writers as Shakespeare and Milton. Every other tongue in Europe must have sunk under the force of so much genius, and but for the immortal verse of which our language is susceptible, we must have been content to rhyme along with the rest of Europe, without any distinction among the jingling train. But in spite of every disadvantage it has so long laboured under, so excellent are its principles, so simple its structure, and so extensive its derivations, that its superiority to every living language is incontestable. The English, not quite so impatient to express themselves as the French, nor so studious of harmony as the Italians, do not, like the former, retrench half their consonants, nor, with the latter, pronounce every vowel; yet, with a vigour and energy superior to both, preserve strength and loftiness enough for the sublimest expression, softness enough for the tenderest, and even a harshness that is suitable to the most terrific and abhorrent. In short, while other nations reform their several languages on principles of volubility or harmony, the English seem attentive only to unornamented sense; and, far from excluding foreign words that are happier than their own, they embrace with eagerness every expression from every language that but promises a nearer acquaintance with the human mind.

But the natural advantages of our language should be so far from rendering us inattentive to its improvement, that they ought strongly to excite us to a rational cultivation of it. When a language once degenerates, it is a striking presage of declining genius; and a neglect of our mother-tongue will not only make us incapable of producing new authors, but abate our relish for the old. As our writers degenerate our orators must necessarily decline; and as oratory may not improperly be styled the voice of the fine arts, an enfeebled or vicious oratory must ever be attended by mediocrity and bad taste. We find eloquence and oratory the constant companions of the freedom of Greece and Rome, and it is wonderful that the state which now approaches the nearest those renowned republics in liberty, should resemble them the least in their attention to these arts. England, favoured by Providence with natural advantages, feels perhaps a sentiment of superiority in her language as well as in other respects, and not being equally necessitous with other nations, neglects those advantages which the Author of nature often annexes to necessity.

It would be superfluous to enumerate the benefits and advantages that must arise in a country like our's to individuals capable of expressing themselves well in their mother-tongue. It is the privilege of every Englishman from the greatest to the meanest, if an Englishman, possessing such privileges, can be said to be mean, to be

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occasionally a judge of the life and fortune of his fellow-citizens. It is his happiness to have a voice in framing those laws he is governed by, and his still greater happiness to have the application of those laws open to the freest and most unbiassed discussion. The cultivation of the arts, the extension of commerce, and the display of every talent in public invite him daily to an improvement in the science of speaking, and as the basis of oratory is a just, consistent, and analogical pronunciation, the work now addressed to the public, if not worthy of their encouragement, is at least deserving of their consideration.

T H E E N D



A D V E R T I S E M E N T

As there are few men of reflexion who have not made occasional remarks on some part of the pronunciation of their mother tongue, the Author could wish to invite such as have turned their thoughts on this subject to a communication of whatever may have occurred to them. Every observation he is favoured with shall have the utmost deference paid to it; and if found to contain any thing new or interesting, shall be marked with such name, initial letters, or signature, as the correspondent shall think proper to appoint. Letters, therefore, on this subject, post paid, directed to Mr. Walker, at the Chapter Coffee-house, Pater-noster-row, will be punctually attended to.

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